

## RESSENTIMENT AND THE PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

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THE PHRASE “preferential option for the poor” has been used with some frequency in recent discussions of social justice among Christians. It originated among Latin American theologians, Protestant and Roman Catholic, and was perhaps first explicitly adopted by an ecclesiastical assembly at the General Conference of Latin American Roman Catholic bishops at Puebla, Mexico in 1979. The phrase has since appeared in papal encyclicals, letters of bishops’ conferences and synods, and in the writings of various authors. Indeed, it has become something of a watchword in conversations among Christians throughout the world as they endeavor to comprehend what sorts of actions they are called to by their faith.

While the phrase “preferential option for the poor” seems to have received rapid and wide acceptance, the notion itself is not without its difficulties. The phrase means different things to different people, and it is questionable whether all of these meanings are obligatory in light of, or even compatible with, the gospel. Is it an option that only the Church as a whole is obliged to make, or is it incumbent upon local churches also? Does the obligatory nature extend beyond churches to each and every individual Christian? And if the answer to that question is affirmative, does the option require each and every Christian to live and work with the poor? Or are there other ways in which Christians can live out this option?\*

Beyond these questions there is, I believe, one even more fundamental, namely the problematic relationship between a “preferential option for the poor” and the phenomenon of *ressentiment*.<sup>1</sup> My concern with this problem arises from two sources. The first source is my own

\* For a critical treatment of some of these issues, see Stephen J. Pope, “Proper and Improper Partiality and the Preferential Option for the Poor,” in this issue (242–71 below). My thoughts on these issues have received an important stimulus from conversations with Prof. Pope regarding his research on the relationship between Aquinas’s reflections on almsgiving and Gustavo Gutiérrez’s writings on the “fundamental option for the poor.”

<sup>1</sup> *Ressentiment* is a term introduced by Friedrich Nietzsche to denote a denigration of certain values arising out of recollected feelings of injury, insult, or impotence. The meaning of the term will be clarified further in the ensuing discussion.

involvements over many years with people—students, faculty, human services workers, and “activists”—in work of social justice. Too often, it seemed to me, a desire to aid poor, suffering, or marginalized people, initially motivated by genuine charity, became infected with a *ressentiment* against the rich, the successful, and the powerful. At the same time as these observations were beginning to trouble me, I also became familiar with the powerful criticisms of Christian morality launched by Friedrich Nietzsche, initially through the writings of Max Scheler, but subsequently through Nietzsche’s own texts. These criticisms provided a second source for my investigation of this problem.

In attempting to work out a satisfactory approach to these issues, I discovered the problem of the relationship between *ressentiment* and the preferential option for the poor to be considerably more complex than I had anticipated. I found it necessary to divide the exploration of this relationship into two phases: (1) an account of the “value of human valuing” as rooted in God’s transcendent act of valuing and loving; and (2) a response to the Nietzschean critique of Christian charity and service of the lowly, along with an exploration of why a specifically preferential option for the poor, over and above Christian love of the poor along with all of God’s creatures, is called for. I have treated the first topic elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> providing the background for what I shall say here regarding the second topic. In both cases Bernard Lonergan’s writings have been especially helpful.

Accordingly, the present article is divided into four sections: a presentation of Nietzsche’s critique of Christian morality; a brief summary of the general conclusions of my previous article; an explication of how those conclusions open up a response to Nietzsche’s general critique of the Christian value of care for the poor; and, finally, an account of the meaning of the specifically preferential option for the poor within the context of what Lonergan has called “the structure of the human good.”<sup>3</sup>

Before proceeding, I would like to add one note of emphatic clarification. Although I do agree with Nietzsche and Scheler that distortions can and have crept into aspects of some individuals’ work for social justice, I do not agree with Nietzsche’s apparently wholesale repudiation. I am convinced that the Christian tradition of service of the poor is *not* in its very essence, as Nietzsche contended, a matter of *ressentiment*. Neither do I approach the issue of a preferential option for the

<sup>2</sup> Patrick H. Byrne, “Analogical Knowledge of God and the Value of Moral Endeavor,” *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 11.2 (1993) 103–37.

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 47–52.

poor as an unsympathetic critic (as has been said of certain "conservative" writers) of the work for social justice. Rather, I believe it is a very important task to seek some theological clarifications of the notion of a preferential option for the poor which, in combination with appropriate spiritual formation, may provide some guidance for Christians concerned with contemporary social-justice issues.

#### A NIETZSCHEAN CRITIQUE

According to Friedrich Nietzsche, the Christian's love of the poor is nothing but *ressentiment*, a subtle but powerful revenge of the weak against the strong. This criticism needs to be understood within the context of his overall project of a critique of morality in general.<sup>4</sup> He states the goal of that project as follows:

Let us articulate this *new demand*: we need a *critique* of moral values, *the value of these values themselves must first be called into question*—and for that there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which they grew, under which they evolved and changed.<sup>5</sup>

Among the "values" which he wishes to find the value of, Nietzsche includes the values of pity, self-abnegation, self-sacrifice,<sup>6</sup> consideration, self-control, delicacy, loyalty, pride, friendship,<sup>7</sup> democratic civilization,<sup>8</sup> humility, patience, forgiveness,<sup>9</sup> truth,<sup>10</sup> love, justice,<sup>11</sup> and, most fundamentally, the "value" of the "good man."<sup>12</sup>

Nietzsche's method for this critique is adapted from philology, the area of his scholarly expertise. He draws upon his knowledge of the etymology of words from numerous languages (German, Gaelic, Latin, ancient and archaic Greek, Aryan, pre-Aryan, Slavic, Iranian, etc.) to discern archaic meanings of the terms "good," "bad," and "evil." This is the sense in which he is doing a "genealogy" of morals; he is tracing the "family lineage" of moral precepts and sentiments. According to Nietz-

<sup>4</sup> That Nietzsche's ultimate objective was not solely the critique of Christianity as such, but to portray Christianity in such a way as to critique modernity, has been argued convincingly by Alasdair MacIntyre in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1990) 39–40. Be this as it may, Nietzsche's portrayal of Christianity as *ressentiment* remains in itself a profound critique.

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Preface no. 6 (*The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann [New York: Modern Library, 1968] 456). References in simple parentheses in these notes are to pages in Kaufmann's translation.

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface no. 5 (Kaufmann 455).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 2.7 (476).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 1.5 (464–67).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 1.14 (483).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 3.24–25 (589).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 1.14 (484).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Preface no. 6 (456).

sche, this genealogical investigation reveals two transcultural facts. First, the opposition between "good" and "bad" in every case originated with the powerful, the dominant, the noble ones:

The judgment "good" did *not* originate with those to whom "goodness" was shown! Rather it was "the good" themselves, that is to say, the noble, powerful, high-stationed and high-minded, who felt and established themselves and their actions as good, that is of the first rank, in contradistinction to all the low, low-minded, common and plebeian. It was out of this *pathos of distance* that they first seized the right to create values and to coin names for values. . . . The pathos of nobility and distance, as aforesaid, the protracted and domineering fundamental total feeling on the part of a higher ruling order in relation to a lower order, to a "below"—*that* is the origin of the antithesis "good" and "bad."<sup>13</sup>

The archaic origin of "good," then, is a *felt* vitality, a *feeling* of self as elevated.<sup>14</sup> Other values emanate from this felt self-worth. Thus power, courage, warrior values, ruling, richness, aristocracy, being cultured, wisdom, purity, justice as up-rightness (literally, "standing upright"),<sup>15</sup> even fairness of appearance and truthfulness,<sup>16</sup> are valued as "good" because they are collateral with those who are "good." Likewise, phenomena such as weakness, cowardice, failure, slavishness, poverty, commonness, being barbaric, ignorance, impurity and unrighteousness,<sup>17</sup> swarthy and deceitfulness are "bad" because they are characteristics of "the bad" whom "the good" feel so far above.<sup>18</sup>

The second transcultural phenomenon is that there is, in addition to the antithesis "good"/"bad," a second antithesis, namely "evil"/"good." The antithesis between "evil" and "good" has quite a different origin, according to Nietzsche.<sup>19</sup> Its basic valuation is "evil," while "good" is derivative as the opposite of "evil." This notion of "evil" emerges from *ressentiment* against an enemy, especially a powerful enemy who is one's conqueror:

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. 1.2 (462).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 1.10 (474).

<sup>15</sup> This is my addition, not Nietzsche's, though I believe he would concur. See his *Human, All-Too-Human* 92 (Kaufmann 148—justice as self-preservation, not getting knocked-down); and his *Genealogy* 1.10 (474—upright as noble).

<sup>16</sup> "Truthfulness" because it means, in this case, "telling it like 'the good' tell it." This is distinct from "telling it like it is" which may or may not be a *ressentiment* value to Nietzsche's mind.

<sup>17</sup> Again, my addition. Unrighteousness goes together with impurity because they are associated in the one who has "fallen," literally, into the filth and become soiled and despoiled.

<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy* 1.2–6 (462–69).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 1.11 (476).

Picture "the enemy" as the man of *ressentiment* conceives him—and here precisely is his deed, his creation: he has conceived "the evil enemy," "*the Evil One*," and this in fact is his basic concept, from which he evolves, as an after-thought and pendant, a "good one"—himself!<sup>20</sup>

Thus the morality raised upon the foundation of this basic concept of "evil" is essentially a "slave morality," since slaves are conquered and oppressed by the powerful. Moreover, unlike the "active" moral valuations of nobility, *ressentiment* is fundamentally "reactive."

While every noble morality develops from a triumphant affirmation of itself, slave morality from the outset says NO to what is "outside," what is "different," what is "not itself"; and *this* NO is its creative deed. This inversion of the value-positing eye . . . is of the essence of *ressentiment* . . . its action is fundamentally reaction.<sup>21</sup>

Nietzsche takes over the French word *ressentiment* without translating it. Literally, it means "re-feeling"; yet it connotes a particular feeling that is being re-felt, namely impotence. One's own impotence can be experienced in a wide range of concrete circumstances: whenever one is in the presence of something stronger, more intelligent, more beautiful, more noble, more holy than oneself. *Ressentiment* is an inability to let go of that experience; one keeps reliving and rehearsing it, causing it to swell and fester. The torment of such a re-feeling is indeed great, and, as Scheler notes, "the painful tension demands relief. This is afforded by the specific *value delusion* of *ressentiment*."<sup>22</sup> He continues:

We have a tendency to overcome any strong tension between desire [for a higher value] and impotence by depreciating or denying the positive value of the desired object. At times, indeed, we go so far as to extol another object which is somehow opposed to the first.<sup>23</sup>

This "extolling" or "valuing" of something else as a "trump" is the basic "creativity," as Nietzsche calls it, of *ressentiment* morality. Since the powerful (the "evil") do what is in their "own" interest, slave morality "values" what is done in the interest of "the other." Thus the "slave morality" creates "values" such as pity, consideration, forbearance,<sup>24</sup> self-control, delicacy, loyalty, pride, friendship,<sup>25</sup> and altruism.<sup>26</sup> All such "values" have this phenomenon of *ressentiment* as their source, according to Nietzsche. As Scheler puts it,

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 1.10 (475).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 1.10 (472–73).

<sup>22</sup> Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (New York: Schocken, 1961) 58.

<sup>23</sup> Scheler 73.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy* 1.10 (473).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 1.11 (476).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid. 1.2–3 (461–63).

The formal structure of *ressentiment* expression is always the same: A is affirmed, valued, and praised not for its own intrinsic quality, but with the un verbalized intention of denying, devaluating, and denigrating B. A is "played off" against B.<sup>27</sup>

Nor is this some mere "conceptual" revolution, for novel concepts alone do not ease the anguish of re-feeling impotence. Rather, *ressentiment* brings about a distortion in the feelings of value preference, until what was originally and spontaneously *felt* as higher becomes *felt* as lower. *Ressentiment* at last gains its revenge over the powerful when it denies them their "spontaneous" value and insidiously spreads its valuations throughout civilization.

Within this context, Nietzsche examines the Christian morality, and specifically the Christian concern for the poor, as an outgrowth of Jewish morality. According to Nietzsche, Jewish morality "begins *the slave revolt in morality*".<sup>28</sup> In his view, the often-conquered Jewish civilization achieved "the *most spiritual revenge*" over the powerful civilizations through a "radical revaluation of their enemies' values."<sup>29</sup> In his view, "the hatred of impotence" for the values of "the noble, the powerful, the masters, the rulers," led Jewish civilization to substitute a new system of values, declaring that

the wretched alone are good; the poor, impotent, lowly alone are good; the suffering, deprived, sick, ugly alone are pious, alone are blessed by God, blessedness is for them alone—and you, the powerful and noble, are on the contrary the evil, the cruel, the lustful, the insatiable, the godless to all eternity.<sup>30</sup>

Evidence of this "radical revaluation," according to Nietzsche, is found in the testimony of the Hebrew Scriptures as "the book of divine justice," for which, oddly, he has great esteem.<sup>31</sup> As Scheler puts it, "the *ressentiment*-laden man transfers to God the vengeance he himself cannot wreak on the great."<sup>32</sup> Though Nietzsche seldom mentions the prophets,<sup>33</sup> their denunciations come to mind in this connection.

Of course Nietzsche's intent in this "genealogy" of Jewish morality is to set the stage for his acerbic critique of Christianity. Nietzsche interprets the ideal of Christian love as the "triumphant crown" of "Jewish hatred."<sup>34</sup> In his view, Judaism achieved victory, "the ultimate goal of its sublime vengefulness," over the noble and powerful through

<sup>27</sup> Scheler 68.

<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy* 1.7 (470).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 1.7 (469–70).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 1.7 (470).

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 52 (Kaufmann 255–56).

<sup>32</sup> Scheler 97; see also Nietzsche, *Genealogy* 1.13 (482).

<sup>33</sup> Nietzsche attributes the source of *ressentiment* more to the "priestly" nature of Judaism than to its prophetic dimension (*Genealogy* 1.6–7 [468–70]).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 1.8 (471).

the "incarnate gospel of love . . . who brought blessedness and victory to the poor, the sick, and the sinners."<sup>35</sup> Scheler explicates Nietzsche's point: "The core of the *ressentiment* Christian's idea of God is still the avenging Jehovah. The only difference is that revenge is now masked as sham love for the 'small'."<sup>36</sup>

Such, then, is Nietzsche's challenge to Christian charity and care of the poor. In his view it is a very creative and subtle form of revenge by the weak upon the noble and powerful. It promulgates the "emotionally contagious" sentiments and ideals of love of the poor as a "trump" against the powerful and rich. Finally, although the term "preferential option for the poor" was not in currency during Nietzsche's time, certainly his critique would extend to that notion as well.

#### GOD AS UNRESTRICTED ACT OF VALUING AND LOVING

Nietzsche is a profound and influential critic, and his critique demands a serious response, one that cannot be made in any simple fashion. In fact I believe that meeting his critique will inevitably be the work of many. For my part, I find it significant that fundamental challenges to what is meant by value and by love in the Christian tradition lie at the very heart of Nietzsche's critique. I have found it necessary, therefore, to clarify these two fundamental notions. In this section I will briefly summarize the results of my preliminary attempt at clarification.<sup>37</sup>

I have attempted elsewhere to answer a question Lonergan raises, but does not answer systematically, in *Method in Theology*, namely, whether there is any value to human ethical endeavor (i.e. to human valuing).<sup>38</sup> In the terms that Lonergan sets forth, the question of the value of valuing is a question about whether it is good (of value) to live authentically in response to the questions which arise from the concrete historical circumstances in which one finds oneself. By "living authentically in response to the questions" I mean, following Lonergan's lead, responding to questions with intelligent acts of understanding, reasonable acts of judgment of fact, responsible acts of deliberation, affectivity, judgments of value, and decisions. My own account of this process amounts to a synthesis based on Lonergan's account of the structure of human cognition, along with some of his later writings on the structure of human feelings as "intentional response to values," value judgments, and deciding.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Scheler 97.

<sup>37</sup> For details, see Byrne, "Analogical Knowledge."

<sup>38</sup> By "human ethical endeavor" or "human valuing," I mean here the structured, conscious human processes of knowing, deliberating and deciding. See Byrne, "Analogical Knowledge" § III.

I then survey Lonergan's discussion of knowledge about God conceived analogically as an unrestricted act of understanding.<sup>39</sup> To his discussion, I add my own extension of Lonergan's analogous account to include God as the unrestricted act of valuing and loving as the basis for solving his question about the worth of moral endeavor.

On this basis, I attempt to show that Lonergan's claim that the question about the value of human valuing is indeed, as he claimed, a question about God. This is so because the question cannot be completely answered "within" the universe. All acts of human valuing, according to my account of the process of human valuing and deciding, are based upon no more than the *de facto*, the *virtual* unconditionality of judgments of value. Judgments of value are affirmations of the virtually unconditional value of undertaking a possible course of action, as presented in a "practical insight." Practical insights, in turn, are known as having virtually unconditional value when and only when there are "no further pertinent questions." Yet it is not *necessarily* that there are no more further pertinent questions in concrete situations; only that *in fact* there are none. To seek an intra-universal reason, "x," why further questions pertinent to value "y" *de facto* terminate, is to seek a value, "x," within the universe in virtue of which further questions about "y" become irrelevant. Of course such values can be found; these "x's" are the "ends" in relation to which the "y's" take on the role of "means," as, e.g., when the value of a biological species's survival ("x") settles whether or not a particular course of action ("y") affecting its environment is worthwhile. But if the values, "x's," are intra-universal, they too are only virtually unconditioned. Hence, the question of the value of the universe itself, the question of the ultimate "terminal value,"<sup>40</sup> is not reached.

From this, I argue, the value of valuing ultimately refers to a transcendent value which is the value of an unrestricted act of understanding, valuing, and loving, namely God. I further argue that the analogous conception of God as unrestricted act of understanding, valuing, and loving provides a reasoned basis for an affirmative answer to the question of whether ethical endeavor is worthwhile; that this answer is derived from the affirmative answer to the question of whether the world-process of the universe is ultimately good; and that the answer is known in nothing less than the unrestricted act of understanding, valuing, and loving which God is. Such, in summary fashion, are the positions which form background for the remainder of this article.

<sup>39</sup> *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, rev. ed. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1958) 634-86.

<sup>40</sup> Lonergan, *Method* 116.



## SELF-APPROPRIATION AND SOME ELEMENTS OF A RESPONSE

I believe that Nietzsche's profundity and influence stem in large part from the truth of much of what he has to say. Which of us does not, upon reading Nietzsche, call to mind some occasions when ignoble motivations underlay our lofty words and sentiments? Moreover, Nietzsche's writings tend to cast a discomfiting light upon many a social movement. As Max Scheler put it:

We all know a certain type of man frequently found among socialists, suffragettes, and all people with an ever-ready "social conscience"—the kind of person whose social activity is quite clearly prompted by inability to keep his attention focused on himself, his own tasks and problems.<sup>41</sup>

In short, *ressentiment* is a real force in history, and the truth of this fact gives power to Nietzsche's criticisms. Indeed Lonergan himself recognized and acknowledged the fact of *ressentiment* as a component in human history.<sup>42</sup> Thus, *ressentiment* can and does form the primary value-motivation in certain specific instances. It leads people to distort the highest and most profound values, including Christian values, and turn these values into their opposites, even to the point where the inverted value-apprehension comes to predominate. This, it seems to me, is the great truth of Nietzsche's critique.

Yet Nietzsche does not tell the whole truth, and so a critical response is called for. Much has already been done to contribute to such a response.<sup>43</sup> Here, however, I wish to move on to the constructive task of providing an alternative basis for approaching the set of problems Nietzsche raises with regard to the status of the care of the poor in the Christian tradition.

The most fundamental of Nietzsche's questions concerns the "value of values." Here, I believe, Lonergan's discovery of the method of self-appropriation has something important to offer. Like Nietzsche, Lonergan attempted to answer that question by situating "values" within the concrete life process. Yet Lonergan's assessment of that process is both more inclusive and more concrete, as well as free from the performative incoherences that pervade Nietzsche's genealogy. Lonergan's analysis is more inclusive and more concrete, for it insists on the facticity of the "transcendental notion of value," with its questions of

<sup>41</sup> Scheler 95–96. Unlike Nietzsche, however, Scheler emphatically distinguishes the false motivation of what he calls "altruism" from the positive valuation of Christian charity (see below).

<sup>42</sup> *Method* 33.

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Scheler, *passim*; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry*, and *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame, 1981).

value and the structured, conscious activities of deliberating which yield answers.<sup>44</sup> Thus Lonergan adds a whole dimension of human valuing over and above the dimensions analyzed by Nietzsche, and also works out the relations of this further dimension to the feelings, the *ressentiments*, and the acts of willing upon which Nietzsche focuses his attention. As such Lonergan's project of self-appropriation<sup>45</sup> not only responds more concretely, but also without performative self-deception to Nietzsche's own complaint: "We are unknown to ourselves, we men of knowledge—and with good reason. We have never sought ourselves."<sup>46</sup>

Thus, to take up Nietzsche's question about the "value of values" one must begin concretely with knowledge of what values are. As I have attempted to show,<sup>47</sup> values are correctly understood as the resultants of a twofold process of knowing and deliberating, a unified process of *valuing*. Hence, to ask about the *value* of values is to ask about the *value of valuing*. In this way, Lonergan's approach puts Nietzsche's project on a new footing, and the question of the value of values is revealed as intending a transcendent end, God.

This particular way of approaching the question of the value of values was, of course, closed off to Nietzsche by the horizon of modernity. Nietzsche did not so much articulate direct arguments against God's existence; rather, he simply took the nonexistence of God as a fait accompli, the verdict of the historical movement which he called "the death of God."<sup>48</sup> Still, that historical movement itself arose out of what Lonergan has called "the truncated interpretation of the subject."<sup>49</sup> Thus, Lonergan's version of self-appropriation opens up an alternative that was closed to Nietzsche. This, then, is the ultimate answer to the question of the value of values. Nevertheless, to repeat, just *what* the value of values is, is known only in the unrestricted act of understand-

<sup>44</sup> *Method* 34–41.

<sup>45</sup> By "self-appropriation," in contrast to "self-affirmation," Lonergan tended to mean the more primordial process of heightening the pre-conceptual awareness of oneself as performing conscious activities, prior to understanding, conceptualizing, and judging them. See Bernard Lonergan, *Understanding and Being*, ed. Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli, rev. and augmented by Frederick E. Crowe with the collaboration of Elizabeth A. Morelli and Mark D. Morelli, Robert M. Doran, and Thomas V. Daly, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 5 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1990) 14–21.

<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Preface 1 (451).

<sup>47</sup> Byrne, "Analogical Knowledge" 109–25.

<sup>48</sup> Lonergan also acknowledged the facticity of this historical development, but gave a different phenomenological assessment: "every absence is a potential presence" ("The Absence of God in Modern Culture," *A Second Collection*, ed. W. F. Ryan and B. J. Tyrrell [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974] 116).

<sup>49</sup> "The Subject," *Second Collection* 73–75.

ing. To insist that what the value of values is must be answered in immanently human terms, as Nietzsche does, inevitably results in a distortion of the value of values.

#### THE CHRISTIAN VALUE OF CARE FOR THE POOR

It is one thing to argue that a proper answer to the question of the value of values rests on analogical knowledge of God as an unrestricted act of understanding, valuing, and loving. It is yet another to show how this analogical conception grounds a response to Nietzsche's critique of the essence of Christian concern for the poor. In this and the next section, I attempt to deal with this further question, first responding to the critique of concern for the poor in general, and then attempting to work out an appropriate meaning for "preferential option for the poor" in particular. With regard to Nietzsche's general critique of Christian concern for the poor, I will be drawing upon Max Scheler's reflections. It will be necessary, however, to invoke some of Lonergan's clarifications at points where Scheler's writings lack sufficient consistency.

In his essay *Ressentiment*, Scheler responded to Nietzsche in an especially differentiated way. With regard to modernity, he endorsed and carried forward much of Nietzsche's criticism.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, he dealt with Nietzsche's critique of Christianity through a discerning series of distinctions. Where Nietzsche's searing criticisms scorched all resignation, all forgiveness, all modesty, all humility, all asceticism, all concern for the poor, sick, and oppressed, and all altruism alike, Scheler distinguished instances in which those values arose out of *ressentiment* from the genuinely authentic instances of these phenomena.<sup>51</sup>

We believe that the Christian values can very easily be perverted into *ressentiment* values and have often been thus conceived. But the *core of Christian ethics has not grown on the soil of resentment*. On the other hand, we believe that *the core of bourgeois morality*, which gradually replaced Christian morality since the 13th century and culminated in the French Revolution, *is rooted in resentment*.<sup>52</sup>

Specifically, with regard to the inclination of Christian charity to service of the poor, Scheler begins his reply by drawing attention to the

<sup>50</sup> Scheler 114–74.

<sup>51</sup> It must be acknowledged that Scheler picks up Nietzsche's scathing critique of Judaism without bothering to draw the kinds of moderating distinctions he develops for Christianity. Nietzsche scholars are quick to insist that Nietzsche was innocent of anti-Semitism and cannot be held accountable for Naziism (see, e.g., Walter Kaufmann's remarks, *Nietzsche* 374–79 [notes 20–27] and 445). I do not know whether a similar defense can be made for Scheler.

<sup>52</sup> Scheler 82.

distinction between the “direction of movement” characteristic of *erōs* or *amor* on the one hand, and *agapē* or *caritas* on the other. “All ancient philosophers, poets, and moralists agree,” he writes, “that love is an aspiration of the ‘lower’ toward the ‘higher’.”<sup>53</sup> This is true of *erōs*, the desire for perfection one does not yet possess. I may add here that in *philia* (friendship), which Scheler does not discuss, there is mutual *philētos* (affection) for *perfections* one shares in common with others, including *philia* for one’s own perfections.<sup>54</sup> Even in the case of friendship among unequals, the “superior” partner gets something truly valuable—honor—from the relationship; the lower partner is not loved for his or her “lowliness” as such, but for the honor he or she appropriately bestows.<sup>55</sup> Thus, the gods cannot “love” mortals, nor could a friend wish that his or her friend be a god.<sup>56</sup> Such “love” would be an unnatural perversion of both *erōs* and *philia* into an attraction to what is less perfect. Nietzsche, siding with the ancients in this respect, considers that any kind of “love” for the “low” can only be due to a *ressentiment* distortion of values.

In response Scheler claims that there is a “reversal in the movement of love” operative in *agapē*<sup>57</sup> from which there is an abundant “overflow”<sup>58</sup> of love. Thus the “very essence of God is to love and serve”<sup>59</sup> because *agapē*, unlike *erōs* and *philia*, has a different “direction” to it. Finally he writes,

And there are no longer any rational principles, any rules or justice, higher than love, independent of it and preceding it, which should guide its action and distribution among men according to their value. All are worthy of love—friends and enemies, the good and the evil, the noble and the common.<sup>60</sup>

Unfortunately Scheler’s response relies too heavily upon spatial metaphors. Simple images of a kind of love which has a different “direction” or is so energetic that it “overflows” its container do not succeed in providing an adequate answer to Nietzsche’s critique. It seems to me Nietzsche would simply mock these metaphors as further proof that Christian love is thoroughly a phenomenon of *ressentiment*.

Be that as it may, one need not rely upon Scheler’s metaphors to ground the numerous insightful comments comprising his response. If one replaces the spatial, metaphorical accounts of God’s agapic love with analogical knowledge of God as the unrestricted act of under-

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 85.

<sup>54</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155a–1156a5 and 1168a28–1169b1.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 1163a23–b29.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 1158b28–1159a12.

<sup>57</sup> Scheler 86.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. 95.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 86.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 87.

standing, valuing, and loving, then Scheler's specific remarks concerning service of the poor not only answer Nietzsche's critique forcefully, but can also deepen Christian apprehension of what genuine charity is all about.

A first step, therefore, would be to reinterpret Scheler's remark that "in the Christian view, love is a non-sensuous act of the spirit."<sup>61</sup> Such a remark is completely compatible with Lonergan's definition of the "profounder sense" of "spiritual" as "the identity of the intelligent and the intelligible."<sup>62</sup> In Lonergan's analogical account, the unrestricted act of understanding that is God clearly fits the definition of "spiritual in the profounder sense," as does the unrestricted act of valuing and loving that is also God, as I have previously attempted to show.<sup>63</sup> Yet in the light of such an analogical conception, it would not be necessary to say, as Scheler's spatial metaphor forces him to do, that there are "no longer any rational principles, any rules or justice, higher than love, independent of it and preceding it."<sup>64</sup> Rather, one can affirm that "a completely perfect act of loving" is completely identical with "an unrestricted act of understanding [and] also a completely perfect act of affirming the primary truth."<sup>65</sup> In other words, the analogical approach reveals that the dichotomy between reason and objective valuation on the one hand, and love on the other, is fallacious when it concerns the unrestricted and transcendent God. Moreover, insofar as Lonergan's approach to the analogical understanding of God as pure spiritual act frees the conception of God's activity from any sense of movement or direction in space,<sup>66</sup> Scheler's remark about what was innovative in the Christian witness to love commands even deeper appreciation:

There is no longer any "highest good" independent of and beyond the *act* and movement of love! Love itself is the highest of all goods! The *summum bonum* is no longer the value of a thing, but the act, the value of love itself *as love*—not for its results and achievements.<sup>67</sup>

These analogical refinements to Scheler's remarks about the love which God is, can also be extended to Scheler's account of *agapē* as a principle of Christian service. For, as Scheler correctly notes, "there can be no doubt that the Christian ethos is inseparable from the Christian's *religious* conception of God and the world."<sup>68</sup> Thus, Scheler ex-

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Byrne, "Analogical Knowledge."

<sup>65</sup> Lonergan, *Insight* 658.

<sup>67</sup> Scheler 87.

<sup>62</sup> Lonergan, *Insight* 647–48, 658.

<sup>64</sup> Scheler 87.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 645–46. \*

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 105.

plains that genuine Christian service of the needy is motivated by an "invincible fullness of one's own life and existence . . . accompanied by bliss and deep inner calm."<sup>69</sup> In this state, one is "almost playfully 'indifferent' to his fate."<sup>70</sup> He continues:

*This kind of love and sacrifice for the weaker, the sick, and the small springs from inner security and vital plenitude. In addition to this vital security, there is that other feeling of bliss and security, that awareness of safety in the ultimate fortress of being itself (Jesus calls it "kingdom of God").*<sup>71</sup>

I believe that this "inner security" is identical with what Lonergan refers to as "being in love in an unrestricted fashion."<sup>72</sup> According to him, "being in love in an unrestricted fashion" is "an *experience* of mystery," for it is an act experienced on the fourth level of human consciousness, but as such not yet understood or known in the full sense, that is, known through judgment.<sup>73</sup> Lonergan goes on to indicate how the experience of being in love, though not itself knowledge in the full and precise sense, can function as a source for judgments of value:

There is a knowledge born of love. Of it Pascal spoke when he remarked that the heart has reasons which reason does not know. Here by reason I would understand the compound activities of the first three levels of cognitional activity, namely, of experiencing, of understanding, and of judging. By the heart's reasons I would understand feelings that are intentional responses to values. . . . Finally, by the heart I understand the subject on the fourth, existential level of intentional consciousness and in the dynamic state of being in love. The meaning, then, of Pascal's remark would be that, besides the factual knowledge reached by experiencing, understanding and verifying, there is another kind of knowledge reached through the discernment of value and the judgments of value of a person in love.<sup>74</sup>

To Lonergan's general remarks concerning this source of judgments of value I would note a further implication when the being in love is unrestricted. In that case the source of one's judgments of value involve a share in God's own love and unrestricted judgment of value. Hence, to a person who is in love in an unrestricted fashion, the value of the universe, in spite of all its limitations and perversions, is something affirmable for reasons beyond finite human formulation. That is to say, such a person would have an "awareness of safety in the ultimate fortress of being itself" because he or she would affirm that the universe has an ultimate value, even without knowing in the full sense what that value consists in.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 88-89.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 90.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 106.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 90-91.

<sup>72</sup> *Method* 105.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 115.

I would further contend, for similar reasons, that unrestricted being in love can ground the judgment of value and loving decision to embrace, in Scheler's words, "all [people] who are felt as *one*, indeed for the universe as a whole."<sup>75</sup> Such human judgments and acts of love arise from God's sharing of God's own comprehending valuation of the created order of the universe—what Lonergan calls "generalized emergent probability"<sup>76</sup>—and of human solidarity. It is out of this judgment of "solidarity" that "[we] are repelled by the thought that we alone should be good"<sup>77</sup> and that we endeavor to perfect what is not yet in harmony with this gifted sense of being "rooted in the universe."

Hence, love in this sense "does not consist in the desire to help, or even in 'benevolence.' Such [agapic] love is, as it were, immersed in positive value, and helping and benevolence are only its consequences."<sup>78</sup> A person genuinely motivated by God's self-communication of God's own loving-being "does not help this struggling life because of those negative values, but despite them."<sup>79</sup> Indeed, being in love in an unrestricted fashion enables one to "overcome [one's] natural reaction to fearing and fleeing them, and his love should helpfully develop whatever is positive in the poor or sick man."<sup>80</sup> Scheler even goes so far as to reverse Nietzsche's accusation of Christianity as a devaluation of ancient nobility with an indictment of his own: There is an element of "anxiety" in the ancient view of love, for it seems to "fear descent to the less noble."<sup>81</sup> Indeed, compared with the "readiness for love and sacrifice, all specific 'egoism,' the concern for oneself and one's interest, and even the instinct of 'self-preservation' are signs of blocked and weakened life."<sup>82</sup>

Of course it is just as impossible to encapsulate the fullness of Scheler's response as it is to abbreviate Nietzsche's critique, for both depend in large measure upon the power of style and detail. Nevertheless, I

<sup>75</sup> Scheler 101.

<sup>76</sup> Technically speaking, Lonergan's use of the phrase means a "generalization" of "emergent probability" to include development as well as systematic and nonsystematic processes (*Insight* 462). Nevertheless, lacking any suitable alternative, I mean it here also to include not only the "bipolar" dialectical processes of position and counterposition, but also the "tripolar" dialectical process that includes the supernatural agency of grace (*Insight* 728). These are needed to intend concretely the universal process in which human history is a real component. See Byrne, "Analogical Knowledge" 125–34.

<sup>77</sup> Scheler 101. Here I am reinterpreting and generalizing Scheler's own point—i.e. that "the noblest men" in the company of the "truly good" are "often overcome" by an urge to go and share the burdens of the suffering (Scheler 100)—to extend to all true charity.

<sup>78</sup> Scheler 92.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 91.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 92.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.* 89.

hope I have given some indication of the elements of a general response to Nietzsche's critique of Christian concern for the poor.

#### WHY A PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR?

It is one thing to provide a general apologia for the Christian value of service of the poor; it is quite another to address the issue of a *preferential* option for the poor. In fact the true Christian's "preferential option" ought to be for the *good*, for, as the Gospel according to Luke puts it, "No one is good but God alone" (Luke 18:19). What, then, could be the authentic meaning of the phrase "preferential option for the poor?"

Let me begin by stating some things that I think it cannot mean, at least for a Christian. The preferential option for the poor cannot mean God "prefers" the poor in the sense that God loves the poor more than those in the middle class or the rich. God does not have different acts of love, some more intense than others. God has one unrestricted act of love—self-love of the self that is *summum bonum*. God loves all else through this selfsame act of love which God is.

Stephen Pope pointed out to me that Aquinas at least admits of a sense in which God may be said to have different degrees of love for different beings, even though Aquinas also affirms that God does not love one thing more than another, in the sense of having a more intense act of love for one thing over another.<sup>83</sup> Even so, Aquinas continues, there could be a second, distinct sense in which God loves one thing more than another, to the extent that there is indeed an objectively higher value of one thing over another in the hierarchy of being. In such a case, God's one act of loving would reflect such an objective gradation in value by willing an order in which one thing would indeed be preferential to another. His primary illustration is that God loves Christ more than creatures because by his very divine nature Christ is more perfect than any creature.<sup>84</sup>

Is this sense of "loving more" applicable to the case of the poor? It would be quite difficult to make such a case on the basis of Aquinas's texts alone.<sup>85</sup> In his reply to an objection, Aquinas presents an argument which poses a serious obstacle to saying that God loves the poor more. It is the argument from the analogy of a master who gives an expensive medicine to his sick servant and not his own son (who presumably is not sick). Aquinas answers that the love is not measured by what is given but by the end willed, and that more is given because the

<sup>83</sup> *ST* 1, q. 20, a. 3.

<sup>84</sup> *ST* 1, q. 20, a. 4.

<sup>85</sup> For more extensive difficulties, see Pope, "Proper and Improper Partiality" 242–71 below.



need is greater; i.e. what is needed to bring that particular individual to the end-state willed by the act of love. It seems to me, therefore, that to argue on Aquinas's terms that God loves the poor more would require saying not only that God gives more to the poor to bring them from a lower material state into a final state of union with God "in the order of grace and glory," but saying also that the kind of union the poor will have with God is higher than the union the rich will have.

Again, the preferential option for the poor cannot mean that a Christian should love the poor more than the nonpoor. In my opinion, this would be a sure symptom of *ressentiment*, not of *agapē*. Wealth has an objective, positive value which is determined by the worthwhile endeavors it makes possible. Hence, the mere absence of such a value cannot be an object of true love; but it could very well be a "trump" played by *ressentiment* against the objective value of wealth and those who possess it. The negative valuations pertaining to wealth accrue, not to wealth as such, but to abuses and corruptions associated with it, which pervert its own value. Jesus summed up the Law in the two commandments, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength," and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12: 30–31). He did not add, "and you shall love your poorer neighbors more than your wealthier ones."

Again, the preferential option for the poor cannot mean mindless denigration or destruction of the achievements of human intelligence and creativity—especially achievements of culture and the institutional components of a good of order<sup>86</sup>—out of hatred for the evils which have historically accompanied those goods. For the good, value, is the intelligible, wherever and whenever it exists.<sup>87</sup> The normative, intelligible achievements of technology, of economy, of social and political arrangements, and of culture are good. Any call for "renunciation" and "revolution" would have to differentiate in any historical situation between intelligible components to be "developed" and unintelligible components to be "reversed."<sup>88</sup>

Finally, the preferential option for the poor cannot mean turning the world, in Goethe's phrase, into "a large hospital [where] each will become the other's humane nurse."<sup>89</sup> Goethe had in mind a modern humanitarian *ressentiment* "love." This is a "love" which abandons the fundamentally active creativity of the self-correcting process of human intelligence, and which is blind to the fact that implementation of

<sup>86</sup> See *Insight* 213–25 and *Method* 49–52.

<sup>87</sup> *Insight* 604–7. See also Byrne, "Analogical Knowledge" 118–24.

<sup>88</sup> See *Method* 237–49.

<sup>89</sup> Nietzsche, *Genealogy* 3.14 (560).

intelligent solutions is one of the fundamental modes in which problems of poverty are to be met in a loving manner.

With these preliminary qualifications in mind, let me outline my thesis: the "preferential option for the poor" needs to be understood in terms of the complex of systematic relationships between "conversion," "orientation," "personal relations," "the good of order," and "the human good as developing object" (i.e. human history as lived). That complex of relations and the reasons for taking such an approach will be explored in the remainder of this article.

What I believe the preferential option for the poor does refer to is what Gustavo Gutiérrez at one point claims it is: a personal "conversion."<sup>90</sup> To Gutiérrez's claim I find it necessary to add what Lonergan called an "appropriate system of conceptualization."<sup>91</sup> Here I draw upon the explanatory, invariant set of terms and relations which Lonergan referred to as the "structure of the human good."<sup>92</sup> In that structure Lonergan related "conversion" as one element to a number of other elements comprising universal features of human interactions.

In the invariant structure of the human good, "conversion" is related primarily to "orientation," secondarily to "personal relations," and thereby tertiarily to "terminal value," "good of order," and "institutions" (including "roles" and "tasks").<sup>93</sup> Let me explain their relevance to the task of interpreting the meaning of the preferential option for the poor.

### *Orientation*

First, then, the "option" is a *decision* of the type that is properly called a "conversion." According to Lonergan, any conversion decision has to do with a change of orientation "for the better."<sup>94</sup> In turn, by "orientation" Lonergan meant the "flow of [a person's] consciousness" in its utter concreteness.<sup>95</sup> Human consciousness "floats upon a series of demands for attention [experience]."<sup>96</sup> Since all acts of human con-

<sup>90</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988) 118.

<sup>91</sup> *Method* 132.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.* 47-52.

<sup>93</sup> Practical considerations demand that I limit myself to the relevance of these aspects of the structure of the human good. There are certainly many other things which could be said about the "preferential option for the poor" in virtue of the remaining aspects of this structure.

<sup>94</sup> *Method* 52.

<sup>95</sup> Bernard Lonergan, "Topics in Education" (unpublished lectures given at Xavier College, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1959) 72.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 73.

sciousness—questions, intentional feelings, insights, judgments, and decisions—arise directly or indirectly out of the flow of experiences, the orientation of one's consciousness is determined in a crucial way by the orientation or "pattern" of one's experiencing.<sup>97</sup>

Concretely a person not only has contents in his or her experiencing; those contents enter consciousness as "patterned." The contents actually experienced are experienced because they are the contents actually selected for actual experiential awareness out of the range of neurological configurations which have the potential for sensitive, memorial or imaginative presentation.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, these contents are experienced in some order, perspective, relative intensity, and poignancy. Adapting Heidegger, Lonergan holds that the selection of contents and their order, perspective, relative intensity, and poignancy are all determined by what one is concretely, actually *concerned* with at the moment.<sup>99</sup> Concern (*Sorge*) as orienting is *felt*; that is to say, feelings which are "intentional responses"<sup>100</sup> constitute the existential subject's concern and thereby orient the flow of his or her consciousness. Concern is, so to speak, what one is in love with or repulsed by at the moment. Thus, what a person loves or hates dominates what he or she actually thinks about. A person's sensations, memories, fantasies are assembled under the sway of the love of comfort or material wealth or prestige or success on an exam or excellence in an athletic performance or a person, human or divine. The same can be said for fears and hatreds; they, too, determine the orientation of one's consciousness. Finally, of course, *ressentiment*, whether sustained or sporadic, orients (or better, disorients) a person's consciousness.

Because concern as orienting is felt, it is frequently not easy to articulate what one is concerned with. Concern is spontaneous; it does not necessarily arise from thematized objects with which one antecedently chooses to become concerned. Concern is present in feeling prior to, and often without any adequate thematisation of it. Orientations, then, are like "habits" of mind and heart. Yet they can become like "ruts" if the concerns which dominate are immature or banal. It follows that the questions one actually does ponder, the insights one is concretely capable of having, the unconditioneds one can attain, the feeling repertoire of one's affectivity, the decisions one is willing to make are all determined directly or indirectly by the orientation of one's experiencing and, therefore, by one's concern.

Concerns, or orientations, are toward ends. They manifest in intentional feeling what one takes "the whole" to be—that "for the sake of

<sup>97</sup> Lonergan, *Insight* 181–89.

<sup>99</sup> Lonergan, "Topics" 73.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 189–91.

<sup>100</sup> Lonergan, *Method* 34.

which" everything else is ordered and their relations determined. Such an "ordering" constitutes what existentialists call "world." Elaborating this connection, Lonergan wrote:

In the flow of consciousness there is not only the concern, what concerns "me," the subjective side. There is also its correlative. Its correlative is the world—not "the world," but "one's world." There is the world of teachers, pupils, parents, inspectors, principals—the educational world. There is another world of priests, parishioners, sacristans, altar boys, bishops. There is another world of doctors, nurses, orderlies; there is another [world] of lawyers, judges, policemen, jailors. There are all sorts of worlds, of *one's* worlds. And the world in which one lives corresponds to one's concern.<sup>101</sup>

### *Conversion*

Lonergan draws upon this existential relationship of concern and world to explain what would be meant by conversion. He illustrates the issue of conversion by way of the particular kind of "orientation" and "world" that "shows itself" in the periods during which a person happens to be oriented by what he called "the intellectual pattern of experience." Such an orientation occurs in the lives of figures such as Sir Isaac Newton, who "for weeks on end" was so "totally absorbed in the enucleation and unfolding of his ideas" that he gave little attention to any practical matter, even food.<sup>102</sup>

When consciousness moves into the intellectual pattern of experience, one's concern becomes the wonder that Aristotle spoke of as the beginning of all science and philosophy . . . all other concern apart from the wonder falls into the background . . . when concern is simply wonder, purely intellectual wonder, the correlative becomes the universe. As long as consciousness is directed by whatever concerns one may have, one is in one's world. But insofar as the intellectual pattern of experience is dominant, one is concerned not with any private world, but with the universe.<sup>103</sup>

Yet no one, not even Newton, lives exclusively in the intellectual pattern of experience. Everyone has practical affairs which demand decisions and, therefore, the prior process of deliberation. The purely intellectual pattern of experience is not designed to meet such exigences; it doesn't have the resources—the structures or skills—for deliberating. Thus, people also have their practical concerns, which seem "narrow" by comparison.<sup>104</sup> In this comparison, the *problem* of conversion "shows itself" most clearly: "To move into the practical pattern of experience *without contracting one's horizon* [of concern]

<sup>101</sup> Lonergan, "Topics" 73.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* 75–76.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 75.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 79.

presupposes perfect charity."<sup>105</sup> As we have seen above, "charity" for Lonergan originates in "being in love in an unrestricted fashion." Such unrestricted being in love functions as an act of reflective value understanding, an act which gives to human beings the reasons which are those of transcendent loving, reasons which the human love of reason knows not.<sup>106</sup> Thus, perfect charity is not simply an intellectual love of the universe; it is a loving embrace of the value of that universe. Insofar as perfect charity is de facto a person's existential concern, that person patterns his or her experiencing and orients his or her conscious intentionality toward doing whatever is in the service of the true value of the whole universe.

What is the universe so loved and valued? For Lonergan the universe is a process of generalized emergent probability. That process is not a mechanically controlled, deterministic process. It is a process in which later stages ("schemes of recurrence") build upon prior stages in no more than a probable fashion. Moreover, what has negligible probability is still part of the universe, and indeed reveals greater value implicit within what is more probable.

Generalized emergent probability is a process within which the specifically human range of operations is also no more than a building upon, "responding to," what has come before. That process extends into the structure of human intentionality because human intentionality responds to what has come before, in the first instance, through experiential attentiveness. Sense experiences of "the world" derive from preexisting natural and humanly constructed schemes of recurrence, insofar as these are permitted experiential representation through the orientation or pattern of experiential consciousness.

Finally, de facto the situations to which human consciousness responds are not purely intelligible. They are a "social surd"<sup>107</sup>—a mixture of intelligibility and unintelligibility, of light and darkness. Yet even the dialectical process which arises from such an admixture is, according to Lonergan, part of an intelligible order, a value, which God chooses with unconditional love.<sup>108</sup> A fully converted person is someone who in fact is oriented toward God and the universe as God actually values it—in all its intelligibility, its tragic dialectical complexity, and its mysterious redemptive goodness. Thus, people oriented by perfect charity are those who can accept the challenge of living their lives of valuing in a world riddled by sin and injustice, because by their

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., emphasis mine. For a complementary account of conversion with a different emphasis, see *Insight* 727.

<sup>106</sup> Lonergan, *Method* 115.

<sup>107</sup> Lonergan, *Insight* 229–30.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. 698–700.

concern they have faith that there is a value in doing so. This means that they are committed by their concern to being attentive, asking questions for intelligence, and resisting all rash attempts to act before their deliberating yields unconditioned values as the basis for acting.

*Personal Relations and Personal Status*

Orientations and personal relations are interrelated. On the one hand, orientations as well as conversions are primarily the products of personal relations; changes in personal relations will change a person's orientation. Yet the reverse is also true (though obviously not simultaneously or in the same respect): a person's orientation affects and constitutes personal relations, and a change in orientation ramifies into changed personal relations.

Orientation is effected by one's concern, one's felt apprehension of what the "whole"—the "world"—is. Orientation is the predisposition in virtue of which a person already has his or her answer to the question about ultimate meaning. Commonly a person picks up that concern through the way he or she responds to other people. The people one emulates, what sociologists like to call "role models," determine to a large extent the concerns one has. Such people are incarnate symbols of some "whole." The persons one emulates can range from a parent or a teacher, to a corporate magnate, a popular music star, or a saint. But whomever one comes to value as having the highest personal status, that act of preference determines a whole network of personal relations. Those most like the "role model" are felt as having high personal status; next are those who can be used to make one most like the role model; off at the fringes of the horizon are those who are not felt as having any contribution to the network of personal relations whatsoever.

Perhaps more commonly but less obviously, concrete existential concerns can be affected by whom one is against. The people, groups, communities which concretely and existentially embody the most deplorable, repulsive, and despicable traits—they, too, determine what one is concerned with. When such negative concerns are operative, a person spends much of his or her energy and conscious intentionality trying to be unlike "them," being wary of "them," trying to seek out the subtle ways in which "they" are out to get "us" and turn "us" into one of "them."

Like intelligible goods of order, personal relations are constituted by acts of human intentional apprehension and choice. We are all born into "worlds" in which persons are arrayed with networks of personal relations. We pick up, first from our parents and later from peers and "significant others," what that array is. We adopt our own orientations

in terms of that array. When a crisis of confidence occurs, there are major shifts in the statuses of persons in the network. In times of scandals or economic decline, politicians are ranked lower than used-car salespeople in the polls. This shift bespeaks a shift in orientation with a concomitant *concern* of cynicism.

From this account, it is evident that there is also a correlation between personal relations and conversion. Any change in orientation brings about a change in personal relations, for a different concern determines a different "whole" (world) in terms of which one assigns status to persons. Again, the most effective way to change an orientation is to change personal relations. There is the phenomenon of extremely self-centered people who, at least for a time, start treating everyone else nicely because they have fallen in love with someone. There is a new concern, a new personal status, and it ramifies outward. Thus conversion will induce new personal relations. Reciprocally, a certain kind of new personal relations will effect conversion.

#### *Intelligibility, Roles, Institutions, and the Good of Order*

A person is in personal relations by virtue of cooperating with people. The people may be immediate or remote. But insofar as one uses his or her intelligence in order to determine "what one can expect of the other fellow,"<sup>109</sup> one is related to others—even to others one does not know with intimacy. Persons act within a complex pattern of intelligibility which orders their actions into tasks and roles, their roles into recurrent schemes comprising institutions, and institutions into a complex, dynamic pattern—what Lonergan calls "a good of order."<sup>110</sup> Institutions need not be highly "formal" like a chartered corporation with a detailed table of organization. A family is an institution, as are the recurrent schemes comprising a social pattern of manners and etiquette. Concretely we always encounter people as operating within some such good of order. Their place in that order is not extrinsic to them as persons; it is largely constitutive of who they concretely are. Persons as having roles within that order take on a status in accord with the way one "feels" the good of order as "world," that is, the "whole" one feels oneself as being in.

So, concretely, personal relations arise out of intelligible patterns of roles and institutions. Likewise, the good of order changes in ways determined by orientations (and personal relations) of its members. Because roles, institutions, and goods of order are the products of human insights put into action, any modifications of those patterns of

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. 222.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. 213–23.

acting will result from new insights. Since those insights are ultimately determined by the orientation of one's experiencing, goods of order change in ways that are fundamentally determined by concern and personal relations.

Insights which transform the social situation are many. They can be simply the addition of "at least one further insight into the situation at hand"<sup>111</sup> needed to apply inherited insights to the problem at hand. Or they can be insights which effect a modest modification of a previously operative scheme of recurrence—insights which improve its efficiency, or insights into a more thoughtful and considerate way of telling someone something. They can be insights into better ways of getting the laundry done or better ways to discipline children (both of which are transcultural, recurrent needs). They can be insights which effect major innovations in schemes, such as the insights underlying the shift from a gold standard to the institutions for managed money. They can be insights which effect the emergence of totally new schemes upon the foundation of already existing schemes—such as the ideas which gave rise to Amnesty International, or the ideas behind schemes for financing the poor in *L'Action*, which operates primarily in Latin America, or the Gramene Bank in Bangladesh.

Finally, the insights can be highly theoretical, such as those underlying Lonergan's account of the structure of the human good, of emergent probability, or of the dialectical nature of history itself. Such theoretical insights are not completely apart from the constitution of human goods of order. Theoretical insights open up possibilities of "third ways" between the Scylla and Charybdis of otherwise hopeless social dilemmas.

Let me repeat, for the sake of emphasis, that the insights which can effect a transformation of goods of order depend upon orientations. Conversion effects a transformation of orientation to a concern, to an interest in getting insights, which is nothing less than the unrestricted value of generalized emergent probability valued and made actual by God's unrestricted loving.

### *Preferential Option for the Poor*

At last we may pull these many elements together on the topic of a preferential option for the poor.

- a. As option, it refers to a decision for "personal conversion."
- b. As conversion, it is effected through a change in personal relations. In the Christian context, it is fundamentally a change in human

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 175.



personal relations to God effected by the person of the Holy Spirit and by the person of Christ Jesus, in his ministry, passion, and resurrection. In his life, Jesus gave unwavering expression of God's unrestricted loving for each and every human being, and to the value God holds for the order ("generalized emergent probability") in which we live.

Lonergan worked for several years at a systematic treatment of some of these issues in his Latin works, most notably *De Verbo Incarnato*.<sup>112</sup> Charles Hefling has recently explored Lonergan's treatment and has shown how Lonergan uses the connections between his notions of self-communication and personal relations to shed light on some of the issues related to the Incarnation, passion and death of Christ.<sup>113</sup> According to Hefling's interpretation, Lonergan's understanding of redemption centers on what Christ, a divine person, *expressed* as a human in the human world of meanings and personal relations. Because Christ, as human, enjoyed the "beatific vision," he knew God immediately and intimately; he thereby knew the value God ascribes to this generalized emergently probable order in which we live; and therefore knew God's loving valuation of each and every human being in that emergent, historical order. Yet in itself this knowledge is "ineffable," and for Lonergan the unique and redemptive thing in Christ's human life lies in the manner in which Christ worked out the *means* of expressing, through his human deeds and sufferings, the divine meaning of history. That is to say, Jesus of Nazareth assessed his historical situation through human experiences, insights, and judgments of fact, and worked out the means of expressing the "ineffable" divine act of valuing and loving through "effable" human practical insights, judgments of value of the means, and decisions consequent on those judgments.

Christ "translated" what he knew into humanly meaningful terms, and his doing so is simultaneously constitutive of personal relations. The acts by which Christ put into action his practical insights expressed an identification with God—a oneness or "concord" of Christ's will with God's will.<sup>114</sup> But, Christ's self-communication is not merely self-expression, but also a free placing of himself in relation-

<sup>112</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *De Verbo Incarnato*, 3d ed. (Rome: Gregorian Univ. [ad usum auditorum] 1964).

<sup>113</sup> Charles C. Hefling, "A Perhaps Permanently Valid Achievement: Lonergan on Christ's Satisfaction," *Method: Journal of Lonergan Studies* 10 (1992) 51–76; and "On the Possible Relevance of Lonergan's Thought to Feminist Questions in Christology," in *Lonergan and Feminism*, ed. Cynthia Crysdale (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, forthcoming in 1993).

<sup>114</sup> Hefling, "A Perhaps Permanently Valid Achievement" 63.

ship. With whom, then, is Christ thereby related? With God, obviously; but not only with God. Since Christ's self-expression is an affirmation in judgment and in deed of God's valuation of the dynamic universe and the historical human order, Christ also thereby willingly placed himself in relationship to each and every human being.

In particular, by his passion and death, Christ expressed God's valuation of the sinful dimension of the human order. Hefling retrieves Lonergan's interpretation of the thorny topic of Christ's "satisfaction" for sin as a declaration based on a willingness to suffer that "can be described more exactly as a *concord* of wills with the offended party or parties, a state of mind and heart not unlike what Simone Weil calls reidentification with the good."<sup>115</sup> Thus, in willingly accepting his suffering and death, Christ *expressed*, first, his solidarity with God in the divine affirmation of the good; second, consequently, his concurrence in the divine condemnation of sin. The cross is thus Christ's "siding with the offended rather than the offenders."<sup>116</sup> Clearly, this identification is with God in every respect, since God is the one most offended by every sin. Yet, as a corollary, it follows that Christ's act of self-expression in suffering and death is also an identification, a solidarity, with each and every person offended in some way by sin. Hence, Christ effects a radical reorientation of personal relations by placing himself in relation with, by identifying with and witnessing to, each and every victim of sin. Christ's passion is both a principal way he established those relations, and simultaneously a way of signifying that he was doing so. In that witness, Christ attests to an unlimited "horizon" which is God's in which every person is valued and loved as having a role in the final value God intends. It is radically different from any limited, humanly devised horizon of personal relations which can find a value for only some, but not other, people and their deeds.

c. As a *preferential option for the poor*, the option stresses the seemingly intractable, unfinished agenda of the order of human history. We all become absorbed in our own orientations, our own world, our own practical affairs, our own network of personal relationships. These direct us to experiences, inquiries, insights determined by our own concerns. But is our own concern as unrestricted as God's? Are our deliberating and the insights we employ in it dedicated to God's order or to our own?

There is a powerful reinforcement bred by success. Any creative period in history has great goodness to it. If it were not good or intelligent, it would soon fizzle. Yet insofar as it is the product of a finite orientation, sooner or later its creativity turns into the task of control-

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Hefling, "On the Possible Relevance" 15.

ling and managing problems that it lacks the creativity to meet properly with fuller intelligence. Not everyone can prosper, because no finite orientation can come up with ways consonant with its own limited meaning of "prosperity" in terms of which it can incorporate everyone.

Hence there is a gap between human concerns which lead to limited goods of order, and God's concern for the value that the universe and, within it, human history are to have. It is "the poor" outside the sphere of prosperity, those who cannot be intelligently and responsibly integrated within the finitely achieved human order, who give testimony to the unfinishedness of God's will. It is especially their brokenness and suffering which witness not just to failure but also to sinful resistance to God's value. This, I think, is what Scheler was getting at when he wrote:

The world had become accustomed to considering the social hierarchy [of the Roman empire], based on status, wealth, vital strength, and power, as an exact image of the ultimate values of morality and personality. The only way to disclose the discovery of a new and higher *sphere* of being and life, of the "kingdom of God" whose order is independent of that worldly and vital hierarchy, was to stress the vanity of values in this higher order.<sup>117</sup>

The Judeo-Christian witness is that God has rather consistently chosen people hopelessly "out of it" from the viewpoint of successful earthly enterprises. From the favoring of Abel, the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, and the innocuous David, to the revelation of a nonmilitary Messiah from Galilee, God persistently reveals the fertility of the improbable—because those are the possibilities which the "successful" overlook. But to neglect what God does not neglect, however "impractical" or "improbable," is to fail to share God's orientation.

Thus excessive exaltation of success and wealth, and the consequent poverty, is a major consequence of the failure to live in accord with God's orientation. This has been true in every age, but historically it may be even more the case in our present epoch. Today, especially in light of the collapse of the Soviet block, it seems that the Lockean principles of modern society—that there are no natural limits to the private acquisition of wealth—have become absolute. In such a "new world order" more than ever the preeminent mode of victimization may be poverty. If so, then to identify with those offended by sin is to express sorrow over their poverty and to witness to the value God intends for the impoverished, contrary to what the Lockean horizon intends.

<sup>117</sup> Scheler 98.

d. To make a preferential option for the poor, therefore, does mean to follow Christ and to enter into personal relationships with the poor, the oppressed, the marginalized. How is this to be accomplished?

A total personal conversion is not only religious and moral, but also intellectual. It recognizes that not only immediacy, but also what Lonergan calls the world "mediated by meaning"<sup>118</sup> is real. It goes on to recognize that the world mediated by meaning is real, ultimately, because it is valued and loved by God. Further, because the good of order puts us unavoidably into intelligible relations with other persons who lie beyond the horizon of our intersubjective resonance of feeling,<sup>119</sup> I suggest that we *always* are *in* personal relations with the poor. It is our ignorance, born of the narrowness of our concerns, which obscures this fact. While immediate intersubjective encounter with poor people can and does cut through such narrowness, the same thing also happens in mediated modes. Through conversation and dialogue—including the mediated dialogue that comes from reading Sacred Scripture as well as other writings—people can be and have been brought into a truer realm of personal relations united with God's valuation of the poor.

Thus, conversion of our orientation can reveal to individuals the truth of personal relations, and thereby open up a multitude of insights into ways in which the preferential option for the poor could be lived out. Certainly one way is through the radical decision to live, work, and form friendships among the poor, the path adopted by so many exemplars of Christian *apagē* from Francis of Assisi to Mother Theresa and Gustavo Gutiérrez. Another, I believe, is outlined by Stephen Pope in his differentiation of a "special" and a "general" way of making the preferential option. The "special way" Pope identifies with the decision to work directly with the poor, as described in the writings of Gutiérrez. The "general way of implementing the preferential option," on the other hand, recognizes the necessity of mediated ways of living out that option.<sup>120</sup> This would mean a careful, critical assessment of the roles and institutions one is concretely involved in, with concern for how they might be changed and improved in light of God's valuing and loving of the whole universe. Again, it is possible that one can make the preferential option for the poor in the way that Lonergan did, becoming "supremely practical by ignoring what is thought to be real-

<sup>118</sup> Lonergan, *Method* 76–77.

<sup>119</sup> Lonergan, *Insight* 212–15.

<sup>120</sup> Stephen J. Pope, "The Preferential Option for the Poor: An Ethic for 'Saints and Heroes?'" *Irish Theological Quarterly* (forthcoming). In a lecture in June of 1991 at Boston College, Gutiérrez himself endorsed the idea that the "preferential option for the poor" can be made genuinely and authentically by people who do not go to live and work immediately with the poor.

ly practical.”<sup>121</sup> Late in his life, his theoretical work on economics, and arguably his work in philosophy and theology throughout his career, was undertaken so that “the widows and orphans won’t starve.”<sup>122</sup> A preferential option for the poor means to convert to God’s valuing of the universe, and therefore to the intelligibilities intrinsic to it.

Finally, this preferential option for the poor is not compatible with any trace of *ressentiment*, though the orientations of many of us who try to follow God are troubled with *ressentiments*. For the order of the universe is not one which demands the apocalyptic destruction of all finite goods (that which is good, say, in a “market system”) for the sake of a reign of wretchedness—Goethe’s horror of a “world as large hospital.” The option is not for the poor as poor, but for the poor, their suffering and oppression, as witness to the need to sublimate all the real but finite goodnesses of human achievements into the greater good that God values, and that makes the poor full members of the human community. For, as God ordered Samuel, “Take no notice of his appearance or his height . . . God does not see as mortals see; mortals look at appearances but Yahweh looks at the heart” (1 Sam 16:7).

<sup>121</sup> Lonergan, *Insight* 239.

<sup>122</sup> Communicated in a personal remark to the author.